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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC

No 82 Dec. 2006

Spotlight on Ailsa Craig

Ailsa Craig cliffs and lighthouse
David Palmar (www.photoscot.co.uk)

Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde has been a famous place since the early days of hand-quarrying the granite in the 1700s. The notorious selling of birds for food and feathers hit the headlines in the late 1800s and in the early 1900s came the heyday of regular steam-boat sailings from Girvan with a tearoom and other attractions.

In more recent times, following on from the initial success of Dr Bernard Zonfrillo (SOC Clyde Branch) in master-minding the eradication of rats on Ailsa Craig, new developments are now underway in the area. Proceeding forward from their already established nature reserve on the island, the RSPB has also an involvement with the proposed Ailsa Craig Centre in the nearby coastal town of Girvan, Ayrshire. This visitor centre will be built close to Girvan town's harbour, enjoying views out to Ailsa Craig, which lies twelve miles offshore. A video link in the centre will allow visitors to watch the island's wildlife close up and feel connected to this special place and its marine environment. There is also the possibility of regular boat trips round the reserve to give visitors the chance to enjoy first-hand intimate views.

Girvan Gateway project, led by Girvan Community Developments Ltd (GCDL), has been awarded a development grant of £250,000 by the Big Lottery Fund. This Big Lottery Living Landmarks grant means the project is a step closer to being an inspirational community development which will put Girvan firmly on the map and open up to the world the natural wonders of the RSPB Ailsa Craig nature reserve.

The eventual Ailsa Craig Centre will provide a range of other facilities for the local community. As well as the RSPB interpretation centre and viewing area, proposals include a theatre/cinema, a world-class indoor bowling alley, children's soft play area and a crèche facility. The project will act as a major draw to both local and national visitors. The increase in visitors to the area will bring significant economic benefits to communities in Girvan and further afield, regenerating an area that has historically suffered from economic and social exclusion.

We are already used to hearing about the tremendous focus which the Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick brings to the Bass Rock and its marine surroundings in the Firth of Forth. Now new proposals to involve seabird colonies on Craigleith and Fidra as well as the Kittiwakes at Dunbar harbour, are being carried forward by East Lothian to increase awareness of these natural riches within the local community and visitors to the area. It is thus gratifying to see similar moves of this kind in the Firth of Clyde - developments perhaps long overdue.

Ailsa Craig from the 'Waverley'
David Palmar

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Uncharted Waters

Gannet between dives *Jimmy Maxwell*

It gives the term "listen to the birds" an entirely new meaning. Not only do birds have their own sounds on land, it seems they also create a unique acoustic pattern as they dive beneath the waves for food - enabling scientists to monitor their activities using an electronic "underwater ear". "Sound travels remarkably well under water and work in this field could be very significant when it comes to conservation issues", says Professor Jonathan Side, Director of Heriot Watt University's International Centre for Island Technology (ICIT).

The island-based centre has a worldwide reputation for its research, and the acoustic monitoring of seabed habitats is part of an overall project to analyse wave, current and tidal data for renewable energy development.

"It was while we were gathering information for marine energy work that we first spotted the unique acoustic 'signature' left by Gannets", says Side, "that led us to look at the possibility of following through with other diving birds". In recent years, the effects of food shortages on seabird colonies has been well documented, and conservationists now agree that apportioning the blame is counter-productive. The Northern Isles are renowned for the biodiversity of their seabird populations and RSPB staff are also involved in the three-year project.

Keith Fairclough, RSPB Orkney senior site manager, is cautiously optimistic about the overall practicalities of carrying out such an undertaking. "We're delighted to see something like this get underway," he says. "To be able to start fingerprinting the avian traffic in such an important marine environment is a big step forward".

"There are a lot of gentle swimmers like Guillemots that won't create such a strong signal, and they also dive much deeper. But the equipment can't monitor more than about three metres down the water column yet, so it's early days".

Even the non-scientific observer appreciates the Gannet's nose-dive - slicing through the water from a 50ft drop - and realises this would create a pretty big sound wave when it hit the water. But according to Professor Side, this was not a significant factor when it came to identifying the bird's "underwater fingerprint". "No, it's not the sound of the splash, it's after that, as the bird swims underwater that we get the unique sound which we've identified as characteristic of Gannets".

So could the possibly quieter swimming movements of Puffin, Razorbill and deeper divers like Guillemot be less easy to identify sound patterns from? Side is quietly confident - "There's considerable experience among university staff when it comes to using acoustic techniques. We're already able to monitor Gannets at 25metres and we've noticed how some small birds 'plop' and create a different sort of pattern. We intend to use much more sensitive equipment to follow this up once the project gets underway".

He stresses the technique being used is simply an electronic "listening ear" which is non-invasive and very unlikely to interfere with the normal activities of the marine life being monitored. "It's not like sonar where a 'ping' bounces back off what's being tracked. Buoys are placed in the area to be monitored and a series of hydrophones at different depths and distances are attached to them. The birds don't seem to be disturbed in their behaviour patterns".

The renewable energy side of the study is aimed at gathering information to help with design of marine energy converters and to use that information to make them more efficient. It's a subject close to Fairclough's heart. "There's a plethora of these wave and tidal machines being considered just now, with an array of attachments, blades and current-creating devices. Orkney is a world leader in marine renewables. Now we've got the opportunity to be a world leader in monitoring the effects too".

Original article in "Scotsman Outdoors" by freelance journalist Kath Gourlay.

Start of a dive *David Palmar (www.photoscot.co.uk)*

Scottish Bird News
No 82 Dec 2006

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 7th February 2007 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire:** Mr J Johnstone, Mr K McGinigal, Mrs & Mr J Rogers, Mr K Smith, Mr & Mrs G H Williams, **Borders:** Mr C Mayger, **Central Scotland:** Ms A M Smith, **Clyde:** Mrs E M O'Neill, Mr M Rollin, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr C A Walker, Mr D T Turner, **Highland:** Ms J Brodie & Mr M MacPherson, Mr C F Childe & Ms H Kermode, **Lothian:** Mr E C Davidson, Mr S Dempsey, Ms A Etherington, Mr D Falconer, Mr R Gillespie, Mr S Gillies, Mr & Mrs N Grubb, Mr & Mrs D Lamb, Mr & Mrs R I H McCall, Mr & Mrs G Pettigrew, Mr J F D Pryde, Mr G Spence, Mr & Mrs A Spence.

...and since 26 July 2006

Ayrshire: Ms K D Armour, **Borders:** Mr J A Burns, Mr I Henderson, Mr F Smith, Mr J R H Wilson, **Central Scotland:** Magnus Magnusson KBE, Dr C Shedden, **Clyde:** Mr P J Kirkham, Mr M C McGavigan, Mr F McGowan, Mr D Smith, Mr R J Walls, Dr S Zisman, **Dumfries:** Ms C M Dudgeon, Miss F MacKenzie, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr I Bradshaw, Mr S P Heaven, Mr T Reid, Mr D Vaughan, Mr D Wiggins, **Fife:** Mr J Alcock, Mr N Hamill, **Grampian:** Mr D Dodds, Mr P Donald, Miss L J Wilson, **Highland:** Mr R Brown, Dr S L Haysom, Mr M O'Reilly, Miss C B Smith, **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs J A D Balfour, Mr M Bateman, Mr & Mrs T H Burne, Mr & Mrs J Cairns, Mr G Carson, Mr & Ms H Coventry, Mrs J Crawford, Mr & Mrs T O Dalrymple, Mrs L Dishington, Mr A Duff, Mr C Edwards & Ms Y Young, Mrs F Edwards and Family, Mr & Mrs J Foster, Mrs M Fraser, Mr J B Frost MBE, Mr K Gilmour & Ms L Allison, Mr D A Hair, Ms C Hennessey, Ms A Husby, Mrs L J Johnson, Mr & Mrs R Kelly, Dr P MacDonald, Mr & Mrs G Macrae, Mrs H Maxfield, Mr M McDiarmid, Mr G McLanachan, Dr S Meddle, Mr G Ogilvie Mr & Mrs T K Pitcairn, Mr B G Sandell, Ms R Sherrat, Mr & Mrs G D Shiell, Ms F Stark, Ms J Whitfield, Mr A I Wilson, Mrs J E Young, **Stewartry:** Mr & Mrs P Harrison and Family, Mrs I G M Winn.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are - **August : 1st** £30 D.F. Donnelly, **2nd** £20 Mrs. H. Merry, **3rd** £10 Mrs. S. Crowther. **September : 1st** £30 D. McKenzie, **2nd** £20 W.M. Morrison, **3rd** £10 W. G. Patterson. **October : 1st** £150 R. S. Smith, **2nd** £75 D. Clugston, **3rd** £50 B. Pirie, **4th** £30 K. Macgregor, **5th** £20 J. N. Schofield. **6th** £10 Dr. Cullen

New members are always welcome. They must be SOC members and over 18. Please contact - ***Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH***

Waterston House closed over Xmas period

Visitors to Waterston House who may possibly be interested in sales goods and paintings for Xmas should note that the building will be closed from Frid. 22nd Dec. to Mon. 8th Jan. to ensure our hard-worked staff members have a well-earned break.

SBRC - New Member

Dougie Dickson, from Fife, stepped down from his role on SBRC during November, and our sincere thanks are due to him for his years of service. Our new, incoming member is Alan Lauder, well known to Scottish birders both as a prominent birder and as an employee of RSPB Scotland. Alan served with the BTO before joining RSPB and has brought valuable experience to the membership of SBRC, acquired both from local knowledge and trips abroad.

Angus Hogg

An SOC strategy for younger people - recruitment by apprenticeship?

This is a draft document for discussion by those that always start talking about this matter at every SOC Conference!

In the article which I wrote for *SBN* 81 on the death of John L.Burton entitled "The Apprentice", my aim was to demonstrate how a primary teacher (not herself a birder) had enabled a group of boys, who did not all know each other, to meet a bird watcher of heroic stature and enthusiasm. That was only one example of a kind of circumstance that many of our members have also experienced, and some of the very important set of factors in the J.L.B story may find resonance with members' own recollections of initiation into the craft of fieldwork and conservation.

I have extrapolated these six factors only:

1 A bird watcher known to the community and the catalytic agent, in this case his sister.
2 His membership of the RSPB
3 His activity in the Leicester and Rutland Ornithological Society.
4 The policy of the old Junior Bird Recorders Club which emphasised note-taking and fieldcraft.
5 The ages of the apprentices concerned, 12–15 years.
6 The merit of enthusiasm.

Birder Colin and young enthusiast Gordon planning some fieldwork

What I believe happened in that classic instance was a stimulation of Symbiotic Alliance which safely absorbed those would-be-birders into its nurture. The SOC today is better placed than ever before to take an initiative on behalf of all the conservation organisations in the country by a gentle expansion of our will to succour those in need of direction and timely nurture. The charitable status of the SOC includes the role of education and promotion of an understanding of the natural world, so much so that the membership at the Club AGM of 2006 expressed its deep concern that this role be fulfilled.

We are not in competition with the RSPB youth initiative of the Wildlife Explorers, indeed our members should do what we can to support them. I do however believe that the SOC should promote its own initiative on a much smaller scale whereby our expertise is brought to bear upon enthusiastic youngsters in ones and twos. We should employ the subtleties of the sociological end of the marketing spectrum and target the few who might advance into the conservation industry. Not "fun, fun, fun", nor free gifts, but an exchange of skills to attain the rewards of knowledge and understanding. We should proceed by approaching local schools and youth organizations, offering a mentoring service to those who would value apprenticeship to an older birder.

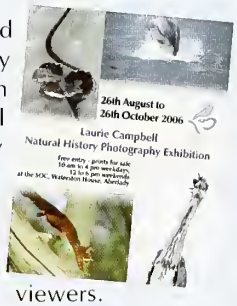
Of the many youth organisations, I suspect the Scout and Guide movement to be most welcoming to us. While being a world-wide movement, it has always focused on the individual personality of each girl and boy. One other organisation was brought to my attention recently by a colleague in outdoor education - the John Muir Trust, which has an award scheme based on the personal development of the individual youngster. Of course our Scottish Education System has always maintained that emphasis on the success of the individual. In the next edition of *SBN*, I hope to continue with the apprenticeship theme for youth development entitled "The Journeyman", in which I will try to show how the SOC member can join in the task.

Duncan M. Watt
duncan@spectrus.co.uk

Duncan would appreciate any anecdotes from SOC members recalling how they were personally helped and encouraged at an early age by experienced birders and possibly whether there was a "catalyst" person involved in the process.

Art at Waterston House

With the excellent facilities available, ongoing art events at Waterston House are one of the best ways of encouraging visitors to the Centre and publicising the SOC. Apart from the picture sales, there is always the added benefit to the Club of incidental purchases by visitors of the variety of goods available such as second-hand books.



During September and October a very successful exhibition featuring superb Natural History photographs by Laurie Campbell took place resulting in sales of over 60 pictures and bringing in a steady flow of appreciative viewers. Many of the pictures featured well-known birds, animals and plants, but the photographer's skill and patience brought a new and unique aspect to the subjects.

Immediately following on to this, a new exhibition opened on 28th October comprising a collection of paintings and drawings by nine artists - some well-known and others less so. The result is a real mix in style, method and medium which enhances the visual appeal. This was quickly appreciated by early viewers resulting in six sales in the first six hours. With this variety the potential for sales looks good, especially as the exhibition goes on over Christmas to the 1st February, with viewing from 10–4 daily.

A corner of the Donald Watson Gallery exhibition
John Savory

Each exhibition was launched with well-attended and enjoyable previews. Displays such as these require much initial organising and then hanging and publicising. Dave Allan with the help of John Busby and Darren Woodhead is to be congratulated on the results.

Keith Macgregor

Bird News in Your E-mail

The past ten years have seen more efficient ways of communicating bird news emerging, mainly as a consequence of improved information technology. It is now possible to receive text messages and browse the internet from many mobile 'phones on the market today, thus meaning that the finding of a rarity or even just the results of a good day's birding can be transmitted to other birders almost instantly.

One established method of communicating bird news is by email, and over the past seven years, a number of email message groups have been formed, some having very large memberships and delivering a wealth of bird news to those who subscribe.

These groups belong to the '*Yahoo* groups' network, a free service provided by *Yahoo* which also covers a plethora of other topics, besides birding. Basically, registering with a group enables one to receive individual emails of bird news sent by other subscribers to the group, a daily digest consisting of a number of messages sent to the group, or one can opt not to receive emails and simply visit the group homepage to read the news. Members of the group can submit their own personal sightings and in some cases upload photographs and files. As well as enabling subscribers to catch up on all the latest bird news in the area, advice and appeals for information can also be sent to the group. Obviously, input from subscribers is the key to keeping the groups active and informative: unfortunately, despite a healthy number of subscribers, several groups feature very few active contributors.

With the success of a number of these groups, and to plug gaps in the network, I have over the past two years formed groups for the Forth, Argyll and Perth & Kinross areas to complement those already in existence for other parts of Scotland. For the *ForthBirding* list, the local recorder, Cliff Henty and I have been in discussion to find ways to improve the

Lake of Menteith, Forth Area *James Towill*

service provided and to publicise the group as an effective way of disseminating information on the bird life of the area. As a result, membership is starting to increase steadily and hopefully will continue to do so.

For the use/reference of members, this list (right) gives the E-mail message groups in Scotland together with the date formed and number of members and lastly the respective homepages.

James Towill

ArgyllBirding: *Formed May 2004, 21 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ArgyllBirding/

ForthBirding: *Formed Feb 2004, 40 Members*
http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/ForthBirding/

PerthandKinrossBirding: *Formed Sept 2006, 19 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PerthandKinrossBirding/

AngusBirds: *Formed Aug 2004, 31 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/angusbirds/

Arranwildlife: *Formed Mar 2005, 17 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/arranwildlife/

Ayrshirebirding: *Formed Dec 2001, 117 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ayrshirebirding/

DumfriesandGallowayBirding: *Formed July 2002, 65 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DumfriesandGallowayBirding/

Fife_birds: *Formed Aug 2002, 43 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fife_birds/

Highland_and_Moray_Birds: *Formed Oct 2001, 139 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Highland_and_Moray_Birds/?yguid=259266370

Lothianbirdnews (Including Borders): *Formed Apr 2001, 253 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lothianbirdnews/

ABZ-Rare-Birds (Aberdeenshire Rarity News): *Formed Apr 1999, 156 Members*
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ABZ-Rare-Birds/

Save the Albatross

This letter has just come to me from Dr Ben Sullivan regarding the latest news in the "Save the Albatross" campaign. It's so full of enthusiasm and hopeful initiatives that I thought it worth sharing with you. We wish him well in the continuing battle to save those wonderful oceanic birds. (Ed.)

I've just returned from a month's travel. This took me to Nelson, New Zealand, and New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia. First stop, was Nelson. This was for a workshop run by Southern Seabird Solutions (NZ). The workshop brought together the fishing industry, government and non-government organisations to discuss the best ways to reduce seabird deaths in trawl fisheries. Over the last 2–3 years this problem has started to receive the attention that it deserves. In some areas the level of mortality in trawl fisheries exceeds that caused by longline fisheries. This is another challenge to work on to save our seabirds. The workshop gave me a chance to talk about the pioneering work conducted by Falklands Conservation (our BirdLife partner in the Falkland Islands) to thoroughly investigate the cause of seabird mortality and develop solutions to mitigate the problem.

It was great to see that work carried out in New Zealand, South Africa and Alaska all generally supports our findings in the Falklands. For example, streamer lines are currently proving to be best way to reduce seabird deaths on trawl warp cables. But, in the long-term we must get fishing boats to better manage how they discard offal overboard. At the moment, tragically, the birds are attracted to a free meal, and then can be struck by the cables and dragged underwater and drowned.

After NZ, it was off to Australia to spend some time with fishermen in the Eastern Australia Tuna and Billfish Fishery, which operates mainly off the coast of New South Wales and we got to work with some pretty impressive guys who are working to further develop and trial and range of mitigation measures. My colleague, Ed Melvin (Washington Sea Grant) and I spent a few days discussing longline mitigation measures with these fishermen and conducted some preliminary at-sea trails on a new towing device that Ed is working on to improve the performance of streamer lines by preventing entanglements. I also had the opportunity to work through many issues surrounding the bait pod concept that I have been working on with Pete Kipel from Fishtek (UK). The fishermen gave us some great suggestions about how to modify our device to make it more compact and easier to use. So now we have to find some funds to develop a prototype and conduct some testing. Always the tricky bit! But I'm hopeful we will get it off the ground. I think it has real potential to reduce mortality in open-ocean (pelagic) fisheries.

Dr. Ben Sullivan, BirdLife Global Seabird Programme Coordinator

Visit **http://www.savethealbatross.net** to find out more about the latest news. If you want a quick and easy way to help - please forward this website to your friends, family and colleagues. Pass the message on - Save the Albatross

Marine Conservation

We are all concerned with the health and preservation of our many seabirds. They in turn depend on the health and diversity of the marine life which surrounds our islands.

Now is your chance to view an award-winning video from the Marine Conservation Society and cast your vote for marine conservation - visit **www.marinereservesnow.org.uk**

SOC Conference

This year saw a new venue for our annual SOC Conference and AGM on 20–22 Oct. at the Duke of Gordon Hotel in Kingussie. This spacious and comfortable hotel welcomed delegates in out of the rain with a fine blazing fire - a good start! As usual, the organising committee and SOC staff shared all the hard work and its success is due to their efforts. This report is a combined write-up by co-editor Jimmy Maxwell (also photos) ably assisted by Duncan Watt, Brian Smith, Campbell McLellan, Roger Hissett, Gordon Riddle, Graham Pyatt and Donald Stewart.

Friday night

Wildlife of St Kilda, a film by Chris Mylne, formed part of the evening's programme. Sadly only a small part, as the digital technology transcribing the original cinematography ground to a halt soon after the St Kilda Wren was screened. Prior to the breakdown, however, we were treated to most evocative storm-heaving seas and a commentary by Chris, whose distinctive voice and poetic style of phrasing enraptured us with the history of the island, both human and wild. It was at the 1989 Conference that I first met Chris Mylne, when he presented a slide show using several projectors - manually operated by him while delivering a flawless live commentary. Had he been present at this year's event, no doubt either the equipment would not have failed or he would have delivered St Kilda's Wildlife in vivid word-pictures in impromptu improvisation. Chris has generously donated his natural history films to the SOC archive at Waterston House.

The SOC Bird-brain Quiz (now an annual feature) followed in the bar. With questions devised by Jimmy Maxwell, our genial Quiz-master, Brian Smith, coaxed the participating groups through a maze of identification, behavioural and factual teasers, generously giving all the extra time requested. As usual, the two groups featuring bird-recorders vied for the malt whisky prize and only a tense extra clue decided it in favour of Ron Forrester's table (see photo). Great fun, and the perfect way to loosen everyone up before the next day's lectures.

The winning group celebrating JM

Duke of Gordon Hotel JM

Saturday morning

SOC Bird Race

The bird race this year took place between breakfast and lunch, which for most people meant 0930 to 1200 hrs. Unfortunately, the weather was not encouraging, being cloudy with poor visibility and frequent periods of drizzle, but at least it was very calm. Consequently only four teams took part (or reported their lists). Two teams achieved 35 species, one team 28 and the other 27. Nevertheless, the combined list from the teams was respectable, at 50 species.

Delegates at Kincraig bridge JM

Birds were initially hard to find, rather silent and grounded, especially the raptors. Our team started at the Ruthven Barracks and were pleased to detect a distant male Hen Harrier on a fence post in the marshes. There was a party of some 14 Whooper Swans on the ponds in the marshes and a pair of sleeping Mute Swans. Mallard and Goldeneye were the only ducks in double figure numbers. The highlight of the morning came on the 'back road' to Insh where we got into a large flock of noisy Siskins. The more expert members of our team detected the calls of a couple of Redpolls among them. Nearer Loch Insh we found large parties of Redwings, yet it was difficult to find a single Fieldfare with them.

In spite of the poor weather the autumn colours alone made the trip worthwhile, especially at our farthest point at Loch Insh where the reflections of the trees in the placid water were wonderful.

Graham Pyatt

Saturday afternoon

Janet Crummy, President, welcomed everybody formally to the Conference and after some announcements, the lectures began...

Chris Waltho - 1966: More than a match!

Chris started the Saturday afternoon with a reminder of events in 1966 - including England winning the World Cup! One of the most significant of these other events was the Tour of Scottish islands that preceded the International Ornithological Congress at Oxford. Said tour organised by the SOC at the invitation of Messrs. Lack and Tinbergen, who were the co-organisers of the Congress. Chris led his audience subtly into the tour by describing the importance of the Scottish islands for birds, not just in Britain but in Europe and globally.

Chris with Andy Thorpe JM

It transpired that not only was George Waterston the "chef de tour" but Chris Mylne was on-board with his cine-camera together with many other SOC members, seven of whom were listening to ensure that Chris's facts were as they remembered them after 40 years. The MS Devonia left the Clyde with 905 passengers of which more than 400 were International Congress delegates. The first important sight was Ailsa Craig, now an RSPB Reserve, enroute to landfall on Rhum.

The use of old photographs in a Power Point presentation gave Chris's 2006 audience as much pleasure as the anecdotes he had collected during his research into "the Tour". He carried us along to St Kilda, the Flannans, North Rhona, Foula and Muckle Flugga to a landing at Lerwick.

Then on past Fair Isle, where the then warden Roy Dennis lit a bonfire, and to Orkney where on Copinsay, a memorial to James Fisher was visited. Along the East Coast the seabird cliffs were viewed from the ship, as were the Isle of May and the Bass Rock. The Devonia then sailed up the Firth of Forth under the Bridges (both road and rail by 1966) before disembarking its passengers at Leith.

Chris concluded his enthralling story with the stunning fact that at least 50 new SOC members were recruited on "The Tour". He then announced the potential World Premiere of a Chris Mylne film that had been located in the latter's recent bequest to SOC. The movie captured the essence not only of the trip but also of the Scottish islands and their birds. The whole talk was highly professional and a grand introduction to all that was to follow.

Brian Smith

Bernie Zonfrillo - Ailsa Craig: Conservation in Action

Dr Bernie Zonfrillo deserves some kind of award for his restoration of a national treasure by the extermination of the rats on the Craig! Bernie presented a comprehensive illustrated history of the island's use by humankind over the centuries, from fowling to quarrying granite kerb and famous curling stones, from shipwrecks to fuelling the lighthouse, and the advent of the infestation by Brown Rats. The graphs and statistics showed how huge was the impact of these rodents on the ecology of the island.

The Zonfrillo era began towards the end of the 20th century, when our hero took from his research a determination to eradicate the murderous aliens.The carefully calculated strategy involved many volunteers, tonnes of warfarin and very enthusiastic helicopter crews from HMS Gannet at Prestwick to deliver the chemical ordinance to the Craig.

Bernie chatting to Pam Draper *JM*

This very entertaining talk on applied science had, of course, the "feelgood factor" of all happy endings - with the demise of King Rat, the island is now under the management of the RSPB and Puffins are nesting once more on that "igneous extrusion" which is Ailsa Craig, or to SOC members, "Bernie's Milestone".

Duncan Watt

Before Tea and Coffee, and assisted as usual by Vicky McLellan, Daphne Peirse-Duncombe officiated at the 200 Club draw, the audience duly appreciating all her ongoing work in this very successful fund-raising venture. Then time to visit the display of books from Subbuteo, the SOC second-hand book bargains and the stand of instruments displayed by Charles Frank Optics. Delegates also took time to study Duncan Watt's interesting paintings which portrayed Ailsa Craig in all its varying moods. Soon it was time for our last speaker of the afternoon.

Andrew talking with Clive McKay *JM*

Andrew Stevenson - Uist Utopia: Sea, Sand, Seaweed and Voles!

Andrew introduced his presentation by describing the island as wet and windy, and having included the elements of sea, sand and seaweed in his title, proceeded to weave a very subtle explanation of the influence these factors had on the island wildlife. This revealed many intriguing and often surprising facts. 15% of the island is freshwater and the hills on the eastern side rise to 2,000 feet. He developed his talk by a more systematic look at the various bird species; again this provided some very unexpected data - 25 to 30 Golden Eagle territories in the Uists and Twite nesting in spruce trees!

However this talk was not just a catalogue of surprises. Serious consideration was given to preservation of the machair and sharp focus turned on agriculture, which was less intensive than the mainland, and how this difference could benefit conservation. The use of seaweed for maintaining the machair fertility was noted and this neatly led on to an account of waders there and on the shore. Dramatic fluctuations in bird numbers occurred due to very basic changes, like crops in "stooks" to crops in plastic bales.

Having covered the landward area, his attention moved seaward. Sea ducks and pelagics, then even further distant to include migrants - geese, swans and the influx from Iceland, Greenland and even Arctic Canada, and finally to rare unexpected migrants.

The last word in his title was "voles". Little was said of them except mysteriously they were not subject to irruptive variations. However since the previous speaker had devoted his energy to elimination of island rats and subsequent speakers alluded to the interface between birds and mammals on small islands, this mammal's presence on the Uists and it's function as a prey item for birds, fitted the Conference theme perfectly.

Campbell McLellan

The 70th Annual AGM of the SOC

Janet Crummy opened the AGM with an account of current SOC developments. Kate Walshaw had resigned as Office Manager. (*The post of Office manager/ Admin. officer has been offered to Wendy Hicks, who is expected to take up the position on Jan. 8th (Ed.)*) Kate's usual organisation for the Conference was greatly missed, but Waterston House staff and volunteers had all combined to cope with the weekend's arrangements. Clive McKay was appointed in April as Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator. This part-time 2-year contract is designed to effect organisation of all the ornithological data coming in from various sources and also act as a unifying force for the team of SOC recorders around Scotland. Janet especially thanked all the many SOC volunteers who work so hard to cover the various tasks at Waterston House.

Regarding SOC Council changes - Jimmy Maxwell was thanked for his three years work and Roger Hissett, the sole nominee, duly appointed in his place.

Dick Vernon, Treasurer, began his report by emphasising the SOC's charitable status and explaining the monitoring of the SOC's activities by the new regulatory body OSCR. He stressed the considerable financial advantages of being a charity for the SOC. With the completion of Waterston House, emphasis was now focussed on eliminating the continuing deficit in recurrent income and expenditure. He enumerated all the different ways in which the Club was now trying to reduce this, e.g. hiring out rooms, holding events of various kinds, organising courses and selling books, paintings and other goods; these activities had already increased income by about £8,500.Dick then brought us up to date with developments in the "Birds of Scotland"

Neville Crowther and Roger Hissett browsing... *JM*

Testing the optics *JM*

(BS3) production which the SOC is publishing. Matters are proceeding well and it is hoped that a good uptake by members will allow us quickly to break even and eventually make a substantial profit. Ron Forrester spoke about the promotional campaign and sponsorship already received, and reiterated the necessity for members to back the venture by ordering this 2 volume bargain at the prepublication price of £45 (full price once published will be £75).

In "any other business", a question was asked concerning the annual "*Scottish Birds*" and suggesting that a certain percentage of each Branch were not interested in the scientific type of contents it usually held. Malcolm Ogilvie made the point that S.B. was only part of a complete and varied package to members and that it was traded by the SOC for other equally prestigious publications, saving them a great deal of money.

Regarding *SBN*, a question was raised about the relevance of the changing code-names given in each issue to enable access to current information on the SOC website. This was seen by one as an irritation and by others as a small incentive towards SOC membership. The continuing use of code-words will be discussed further.

A question about the encouragement of younger SOC membership was ably answered by Duncan Watt who is concerned about this aspect and is already exploring possibilities through the Ayrshire branch which could be taken up by others in due course.

Saturday night

Delegates gathered for the Conference Dinner in the large dining room where we were overlooked by very large oil paintings on all sides. In these grand surroundings, a very acceptable meal was enjoyed and Andrew Stevenson entertained us with humorous tales of "those hedgehogs" and the sick sheep that became a crofter's treasure trove!

The company then retired to the Conference Room where a unique musical event was to take place. Kristopher Lennox, a young composer/pianist, had created a short three-movement piece for piano entitled "The Craig". As Duncan Watt explained in the introduction, the piece arose out of impressions of sailing to Ailsa Craig, the weather, the terrain etc. and Kristopher duly gave us a flawless performance which captured the imaginations of the audience and caused great comment and interest. Kristopher had travelled up especially from Ayrshire to give us this Scottish Island input and Duncan expressed our thanks to him.

Sunday morning

Breakfast, and into a full morning of lectures...

Jim with Malcolm Ogilvie *JM*

Jim Cassels - Birding in Arran

Despite being awarded the least envied slot in the conference, the first talk on Sunday morning, Jim kept everyone awake with his enthusiasm for Arran and its very varied selection of birds and habitats. With only two SOC members living on the island, he said it was under-watched and under-recorded as evidenced by a Hoopoe which turned up in June 2006 and was seen by only one person. Raptors are generally doing well on Arran, with five pairs of Golden Eagles and 12–15 pairs of Peregrines. With the formation of the Arran Moors SPA, about 80% of the island now has some form of protection, if Forestry Commission land is included.

Duncan Watt thanking the pianist Kristopher Lennox *JM*

For the main part of his talk, Jim took us on a well illustrated tour of the main habitats on Arran, including the extensive areas of heather moorland. These hold about 5% of the UK's Hen Harriers, with 23 pairs fledging young in 2006. There are plans to reintroduce Black Grouse to the island. Conifer plantations from the last century are now being felled and some of this land is being returned to moorland, with other parts being planted with a mixture of Scots Pine and deciduous trees.

Areas of farmland can also be productive, with the efforts of one farmer leading to success in the Silver Lapwing and Farming for Wildlife in Scotland competitions recently. Over 300 Linnets were present on the farm this September. Although there are no spectacular seabird cliffs or mudflats, the coastline is good for a range of shorebirds, with nationally important numbers of Red-breasted Merganser and the possibility of all three diver species for much of the year. Jim ended his talk with a plea for more people to SEND IN RECORDS for Arran. Janet Crummy promised that the presidential yacht would take her there soon to comply with this request.

Roger Hissett.

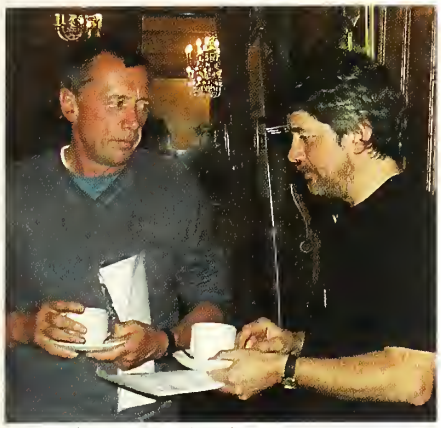
Bob Swann - The Canna Seabird Recovery Programme

It's always encouraging to hear a positive conservation story and Bob Swann's account certainly fell into that category. His long association with the Highland Ringing Group's monitoring work on Canna was reflected in his encyclopaedic knowledge of both the island and its seabird populations. Indeed the value of long term data collection was aptly illustrated in the identification and evaluation of major declines in the seabird colonies.

Bob took us through the evidence of falling numbers and breeding failure of key species like Shag, Guillemot, Razorbill, Manx Shearwater and gull species. Changes in breeding behaviour, for example Shags and Guillemots deserting traditional boulder field nest-sites for cliff ledges, and the fact that these declines were not happening on other islands pointed to another factor other than just food shortages. The huge increase in Brown Rat numbers due to successive mild winters was causing high levels of predation on eggs and small chicks.

The solution was an eradication project, a huge co-operative effort involving European Union grant aid, The National Trust for Scotland, Highland Ringing Group, Islanders, volunteers, a commercial

company Wildlife Management International Ltd, and not forgetting the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland who removed 158 endemic Woodmice for re-introduction at a later date.



Bob "talking rats" with Bob McGowan *JM*

It was a massive logistical exercise, first setting out 4,338 baiting stations, often in precarious locations and then distributing 23 tonnes of a first generation rodenticide. It was estimated that 7,000 rats were poisoned, most in the first two weeks. Over the 2005–06 winter a strict monitoring regime was put in place, cocoa-flavoured chew blocks being used to check for any fresh gnaw marks, as evidence of the continued presence of rats. The team are relatively confident of a successful outcome but checks will be carried out for a further two years.

The devastating food shortages in 2005 & 2006 has complicated analysis of the project but the first signs are encouraging, one Manx Shearwater chick being reared for the first time since 1997, and Razorbills showing good recovery.

As usual Bob's presentation was of a very high standard and peppered with anecdotes like the description of Ravens jumping up and down on the tubes to 'shoogle' out the wax blocks. The clarity of the analysis of this potentially catastrophic scenario was greatly appreciated by everyone.

Gordon Riddle

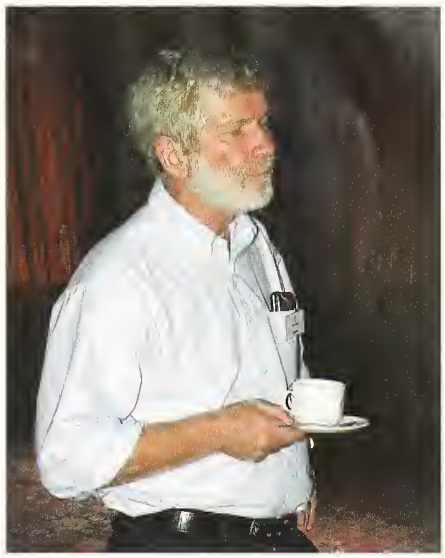
Malcolm signing his book for Donald Stewart *JM*

Eric Meek - Some Aspects of Orcadian Ornithology

An excellent morning was completed by the RSPB's area manager for Orkney, Eric Meek. In a very professional review of Orkney's birds Eric summarised their current status and some of the changes during his 25+ years there. With 23% of the land area designated as SSSIs and 13 RSPB reserves, Orkney was a very important archipelago. Starting with the seabirds, Eric described some of the main sites, from the well-known Marwick Head on Mainland to the reasonably accessible Noup Cliffs on Westray and the decidedly inaccessible offshore stacks like Sule Skerry, Sula Sgeir and North Rona. As is now well known, many of the seabirds are facing difficulties: the 'splash-divers' (Kittiwake & Arctic Tern) have been in trouble for 20 years but now others too are suffering, the kleptoparasites (Arctic & Great Skuas), the deep divers (the auks) and the plankton-feeders (Fulmar & Storm Petrel). Only Gannets and Black Guillemots seemed to be still thriving. While at one time the main threats had seemed likely to come from North Sea oil, the main problem now was clearly food shortage, caused almost certainly by the warming of the sea (up two degrees in the past 15 years). Other threats facing Orkney's seabirds included fish-farming and tidal energy projects.

Turning to landbirds, Eric then reviewed the raptor species for which Orkney is famous. Both Merlin and Hen Harrier suffered declines in the 1980s and early 90s but seem to have recovered since then to roughly their former numbers. Marsh Harrier had bred in Orkney since 2001 though sadly not in 2006. The Orkney population of Short-eared Owls (up to 80 pairs in some years) was nationally important and was dependent on the Orkney vole. Less positive was the fate of the Corncrake in Orkney. Despite widespread adoption of Corncrake-friendly regimes which had been successful on Coll, Tiree and the Uists - and despite the creation of a special reserve on Egilsay - the species maintained only a precarious toehold in the islands. The main threats to Orkney's landbirds came, as elsewhere, from inappropriate wind-farm developments and from a lack of winter feed for small passerines (Twite and Reed Bunting).

Eric completed his overview with a summary of some of the important wintering species: up to 500 or more Great Northern Divers and 120 Slavonian Grebes in Scapa Flow alone, enormous numbers of swans, geese and ducks on the inland lochs and up to 60,000 waders (especially Ringed Plovers, Purple Sandpipers and Turnstone). And then there



Eric before his talk *JM*

were the rarities, particularly at the observatory on North Ronaldsay. Anything might turn up, from Pallid Harrier to Pallas's Warbler, King Eider to Hoopoe, or owls from any quarter - Snowy from the north, Tengmalm's from the east or Scops from the Mediterranean. On one occasion a Common Rosefinch (from Scandinavia) and a Tennessee Warbler (from America) were found in the same garden! Orkney was clearly a special place and we were grateful to Eric Meek for describing it to us so vividly.

Donald Stewart

Unfortunately the last item of the day, Mike Martin's talk on "the Isle of May", couldn't take place, as the speaker had been delayed down south by airport fog. And so to round off the Conference, the Raffle was conducted by Janet, raising a total of £207 for SOC funds. She thanked everyone for their generosity and also voiced our appreciation to Paul Speak for all his technical help in the audio and visual presentations, especially as this was a new venue with its attendant difficulties. She thanked all the Guest Speakers who had transported us round so many of our Scottish Islands - perhaps memories refreshed and ideas generated for possible future trips?

The Kingussie countryside was beginning to acquire its wonderful autumn colours and as this year's Conference came to a close, Janet wished members a safe and enjoyable journey home.

In 2007, the SOC Conference will take place again at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, but at the original later date of 2–4 November.

SOC Tour of the Scottish Islands 1966

John Melrose, Bobby Smith and David Bain JM

'The Devonia'

Stan Laybourne and Neville Morgan JM

At the SOC Conference in October, Chris Waltho's talk focused on the above tour which preceded the International Ornithological Congress at Oxford. At our Conference were seven of the original passengers on that Tour (see photos above)

From left; John Melrose, Bobby Smith, Jimmy Maxwell and Stan Laybourne

The Bannermans taking a stroll on deck

On left; Willie Brotherston. On right; Prof. George Dunnet (other two?)

Nora Henderson and Audrey James JM

If you have any further information on the photos shown here or other interesting facts or memories of the Tour, please get in touch with me at my E-mail address (see the Caption Competition) or just by writing to the SOC at Waterston House.

Jimmy Maxwell

George Waterston

Jimmy McGeoch and Derek Ratcliffe passing the Isle of May

Bobby Smith has given us some images (mostly taken by himself) of other passengers on this historic trip, some of whom you may recognise. They are shown below with a few comments and the names of those whose identity we could trace.

A party on Askival, Rum, with NCC officer ringing a young Manx Shearwater - can you identify anyone?

MFMM on the left, with those large binoculars

Bobby Smith and Jimmy Maxwell

Jimmy Maxwell

Gulls - a problem

A report, *Review of Urban Gulls and their Management in Scotland,* commissioned from the BTO by the Scottish Executive, has just been published. This highlights the relative lack of hard scientific knowledge behind the perceived problem of gulls living in urban areas, an issue which has gained increasing media attention recently. Despite this, we consider that there are simple practical measures that individuals and local authorities can adopt if they consider action is necessary.

There is no doubt that increasing numbers of gulls are nesting in towns and cities in Scotland. This can sometimes bring these birds into conflict with human interests, either through nuisance or damage to property or, less often, as a threat to human health or safety. Often the first reaction to such conflicts is a call for eradication through culls. Where there is a genuine threat to public health and safety or a risk of disease, there is already legal provision allowing gulls to be killed or their nests/eggs destroyed. However, there are almost certainly more effective and sensible solutions that are sustainable in the long-term. Gulls breed in cities because there are suitable nest sites and plentiful food. Simple measures can be taken that reduce the availability of these two key resources and will, therefore, effectively encourage the birds to nest elsewhere. With the overall UK herring gull population in decline, non-lethal long-term solutions are, in the vast majority of cases, best for both people and wildlife.

'Seagulls' have lived in association with people for thousands of years. The species most relevant to the current debate are Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls which hunt fish and other marine creatures, but which are also opportunist scavengers adapting to virtually any readily available food source. They breed mainly around coastal cliffs, dunes and islands but, since the early 1970s, increasing numbers have nested on flat-roofed buildings in towns. The likely reasons for this are primarily the growth of fast-food outlets and increased use of easily penetrated plastic bin-bags with resulting availability of food waste, and secondarily the fact that flat roofs provide secure, undisturbed nesting sites close to this food source. Despite the increase in towns, the overall UK population of Herring Gulls has decreased sharply - a decline of approximately 53% between 1969 and 2002: (Seabird 2000 Census, Seabirds and Cetaceans JNCC, Aberdeen).

The problems most often cited by people who have gulls on or near their property generally fall into three categories.

The first is general nuisance, in particular the noise of calling gulls and incidence of birds swooping at people or pets. The latter generally occurs when chicks have fallen from nests and parent birds try to defend them by aggressive behaviour towards people.

The second is safety when, occasionally, swooping gulls generate potentially dangerous levels of panic amongst some people, particularly the elderly.

The third category is damage to property, specifically mess caused by droppings, damage caused by birds picking at roofing materials etc. and the blocking of rones and flues with nest material.

Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are protected by UK and EU law, but General Licences are issued by the Scottish Executive to control these species, which permit the use of lethal methods. These may only be used when birds can be shown to constitute a threat to human health and safety, or in order to prevent serious damage to crops and livestock or the spread of disease. Any methods used must be humane and the use of poison is prohibited except under a separate specific government licence. Gulls are not, however, included in the definition of a 'Statutory Nuisance' within the Environmental Protection Act, and so there is no legal provision for killing gulls simply because they are considered to be a nuisance. Within these legal limits local authorities and individual businesses and householders have powers to address problems with urban gulls at their discretion.

There is no clear evidence that large-scale culls (which are in any case not legal under the overall EU legislation) would be effective in the long-term at reducing widespread perceived problems. It is unlikely that culling at landfill sites would reduce gull populations in towns or vice versa. Nest or egg removal requires sustained effort because gulls are long-lived birds with a breeding-life spanning several years and, in any case, a female that loses eggs will often re-lay within a few weeks.

We believe the two most effective sustainable long-term measures would be the simultaneous reduction of both food availability and nest site attractiveness. However, these are solutions that require long-term planning and action well ahead of the nesting season.

The less food that is available to gulls on streets, the less attractive an area will be. There is good evidence that areas that use wheelie-bins have fewer problems than areas where rubbish is collected in plastic sacks that are easily penetrated. Some people do also deliberately feed gulls. Where a problem has been recognised, this should be discouraged. Some local authorities are considering by-laws to prevent the feeding of gulls in certain areas. Gulls also feed at landfill sites in considerable numbers, though improved operating practices have in recent years led to reduced food availability at these places.

Where there is not a genuine problem, nesting birds should be left undisturbed. When gulls do need to be discouraged, several non-lethal methods are available. One of the most effective is a simple system of wires stretched on a frame or between brackets and positioned 30cm above the potential nest surface. This prevents gulls from landing and folding their wings. A range of other devices is available commercially. Some local authorities have reported success with audible deterrents that play gull alarm calls and/or the sounds of predators. Fixtures should be checked with the local fire brigade to ensure that they do not constitute a fire risk.

We are currently recommending that the Scottish Executive produce guidance clarifying the legal status of wild gulls and that they should research and produce guidance for local authorities as to what non-lethal methods for discouraging nesting gulls are available and which are the most effective. We also recommend that local authorities adapt this guidance to their local situations and implement measures to reduce the availability of food to gulls where appropriate.

Keith Morton, RSPB Scotland
Keith.morton@rspb.org.uk

Notes on the Hoodwink (*Dissimulatrix spuria*)

Bobby Smith

Continuing our retrospective series on notable Scottish Ornithologists, we come to the last of your offerings on the famous Maury Meiklejohn. Bobby Smith (Dumfries Branch) writes about experiences with him on page 16, and below, Michael Thomas (Clyde Branch) has sent us "Notes on the Hoodwink". This is truly a unique piece of writing; indeed many of its phrases have entered the vocabulary and parlance of birdwatchers today. If you see yourself in any of this, then it has certainly achieved its purpose!

After conversations with many bird-lovers, glances at my own ornithological notebooks and perusal of articles in ornithological journals, I am impressed by the number of records of birds partially seen or indeterminately heard; and it seems evident that the majority of these records are attributable to a single species - the Hoodwink, which I propose to name *Dissimulatrix spuria*.

The existence of this species has already been recognised by several authors, amongst them James Thurber, who has presented a somewhat imaginative picture of the bird perched upon a spray of Ragamuffin.

Gaetke, on Heligoland, shot several specimens of the Hoodwink, but they invariably fell over steep cliffs into the sea and "were not secured".

Observers in tropical forests are familiar with the Hoodwink, which invariably keeps to the densest vegetation (where it is extremely vociferous), and refuses to be lured into the open by the observer's imitation of a Black Mamba. The Hoodwink has several times been photographed: it is the brown blur that passes rapidly from right to left in all ornithological films. In many records of bird song, also, the Hoodwink can be heard in the background, imitating the barking of dogs, the hooting of automobiles, the pleasant drone of the farm tractor, etc. The Hoodwink was known to the Ancients: unsatisfactory views of the Hoodwink, before the invention of the telescope, led to unreliable early records of the Phoenix, Roc, Harpy, Hippogriff, Barnacle Goose, etc. Nor has the Hoodwink been neglected in literature: it is clear to the experienced observer that both Keats and Shelley wrote Odes to the Hoodwink.

The bird has also a definite place in British folklore; in parts of East Anglia it is, to this day, considered lucky to drink a gallon of beer both before and after first hearing the Hoodwink in spring.

A peculiarity of the Hoodwink is that it is more frequently observed by beginners in ornithology than by more practised observers. Yet records by practised observers exist. In a recent number of the Ibis a well-known ornithologist, in order to demonstrate the fatuity of "sight records", related how he had seen a Common Buzzard identified by a German zoologist as a White-tailed Eagle. Now, according to the evidence to hand, there is no presumption that it was a Buzzard rather than an Eagle. Surely a third hypothesis is possible - that it was a Hoodwink.

And readers of ornithological literature in the 1930s will remember the case of the Hoodwink on one of the London reservoirs which imitated now the Great Northern Diver, now the Black-throated.

Only one record of a ringed Hoodwink exists: on being ringed, at Tooting Bec, it was entered in the schedule by the Misses Motmot and Tody as "Little Tom Tit", and was subsequently recorded as "Blue Tit, imm." On being retrapped, it was thought by Miss Eleanora Falcon (of Woking), after reference to the Handbook, to be a Lanceolated Warbler.

It was later found dead, in an advanced state of decomposition, and identified by Mrs. Snow-Bunting, also of Tooting, as her Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*, Percy.

Below is listed what information has so far been obtained relating to the bird:

The HOODWINK - *Dissimulatrix spuria* spec. nov. (Restricted typical locality, "Mon Repos," Waterloo Boulevard, Bournemouth.)

Habitat - Catholic, with marked preference for suburban birdtables. Frequently haunts cliffs, tropical forests, beds of ragamuffin (Thurber) and other places where quick dash to cover is possible. In Southern France in winter often found in loose association with other Hoodwinks.

Field Characters and General Habits - Generally recognisable by blurred appearance and extremely rapid flight away from observer.

Polymorphous and strongly imitative - when imitating another species closely similar to an allied species, will tend to imitate the rarer, i.e. Greenish rather than Willow Warbler, Collared rather than Pied Fly-catcher, Blue-spotted Whitethroat rather than White-Spotted Bluethroat, etc.

Usually solitary - but Miss Florence Pratincole records a flock of Hoodwinks, seen many years ago near childhood home at Budleigh Salterton: Col. Trumpeter-Swan, uncle of observer, who had lived many years in India, insisted categorically that they were Hoodwinks. Most information on field characters obtained from bird-tables by Committee of Suburban Bird-lovers: "a brownish silent bird, which jumped up and down all the time" (Miss Ruby Godwit, Murrayfield). "I could not see whether it was as big as a thrush, but it seemed to fancy cold porridge" (Miss Betsy Phalarope, Auchenshuggle). "About the size of a piece of wood" (Mrs. Carolina Craik, Epping). P. B. Shelley's observation that Hoodwink resembles "poet hidden in the light of thought" not confirmed by later observers. Ordinary gait a rapid scuffle: in breeding season "a stealthy walk" (Turnstone, Fun in Birdland). On water dives readily: average of 373 dives approx. 30 minutes-in each case the observer went home to tea before the Hoodwink had risen to the surface. Apparently roosts among rows of bottles in bitternlike posture.

Voice - Usual call a shrill, slightly sibilant, "pee-pee-wee,"perhaps the same as that rendered by Slobeend as "wee-pee-pee." Also utters "a long-drawn wheezing sigh" (Wigeon in litt.), perhaps identical with the "protracted sighing wheeze" described by R. C. Pochard. Call. resembling the creaking of an unoiled hinge, formerly supposed to be uttered by Hoodwinks, now shown to be made by the creaking of an unoiled hinge. Also highly imitative, e.g. of Redwing, a sound commonly produced on October evenings, when ornithologists are listening for Redwings. In February and early March utters a loud, ringing "cuckoo"(Daily Press, passim). Song Period.-Prolonged research involving rising at dawn, stop-watches and B.Sc. degrees has conclusively shown that the Hoodwink does not sing all the day long: sometimes it sings, sometimes it is silent.

It has been suggested that Scottish Hoodwinks, on physiological grounds, should be separated as D. s. annielaurieae on account of prolonged singing on 31 December-described by McSporran as "supersong." The Scottish form does not, apparently, sing on Sundays (v histogram in possession of Ecclefechan Burns Club). Display and Posturing.- In breeding season male flies round in ever-decreasing circles, evoking no response whatsoever from female. Also indulges in "false preening," "false sleeping," "false waking"(A form of distraction display also recorded among university students), "false eating," "false drinking," "false singing" and "false dancing" and, in the case of the female, a rapid movement of the toes denominated by Steinwaelzer as "false knitting" (pseudotricotage). "Distraction display" takes the form of "rodentrunning"- only backwards: this causes female observers to run away, screaming (see Y. B. Sapsucker, The Distraction Display of the Female Ornithoscoper).

Breeding. Details little known, but undoubtedly sometimes reproduces by binary fission; many reliable ornithologists, watching the Hood-wink, have seen it split into two halves and flyaway in opposite directions. Nest. Uses old mares' nests; eggs also laid at random, e.g. in egg-cups. Apparently responsible for the construction of old nests, involving young oologists in climbing very high trees or very steep cliffs: these nests often found to contain old baked-bean tins. Eggs. Served in British hotels - recognisable by glycerine-like consistency and frequent presence of embryo. Also possibly in Egypt, where eggs described as tasting "as if laid by mummy" (Lord Edward Cecil). Clutch-size. Unknown, but, on approach of ornithologist, Hoodwink usually lays more eggs, or removes those already laid.

Food. Analysis of two stomachs reveals 80 per cent. vegetable food (pipe-cleaners and breakfast cereals) (McSporran considers breakfast cereals to be mineral), but has been seen to pursue and kill a male Nitwit. Also recorded, shoots and seeds of Lexnon-scripta, Copia verborum, Lapsus calami and Insania amabilis. McSporran considers that haggises are the pellets of the Hoodwink.

Distribution - British Isles. Sporadic: number of records depends more on character of observer than on frequency of species. Miss Fanny Pine-Grosbeak (Chorlton-cum-Hardy) has more than 322 re-cords. Miss Euphemia Wryneck accurately refers to the status of the Hoodwink in Birmingham as "pretty casual."

Interesting population studies of the Hoodwink have been made, using "transects" taken from railway trains and nocturnal counts from lighthouses (Goosander and Smew, Zeitschrift fuer mittelrutlandische Ornithologie, Vol. CCLI).

Migrations - Apparently aimless movements. British Hoodwinks move in a rough circle involving Fair Isle, the Isle of May, Holy Island, Spurn Point, Cley-next-the-Sea (Norfolk), the Norfolk Broads, Romney Marsh, the London Reservoirs, the Severn Estuary, Skokholm and the breeding quarters of the Kite (a Welsh village called Hush) - with occasional trips to the Camargue. Distribution abroad - Almost ubiquitous; coinciding remarkably with the distribution of the Fervent Ornithoscoper Ornithoscopa perfervens, on which it is partially parasitic.

Description - Little known, although in the opinion of Elliott (inoratione recta) is not infrequent in museum collections, many skins becoming "hoodwinked." Brown speculum characteristic of third year female, though this is often obscured. General plumage, buffish fawn shading to fawnish buff. Soft parts (i.e. hard parts): fawnish horn shading to hornish fawn.
Characters and allied forms - Immediately recognisable by the fact that the true basipterygoid processes are absent, but more anteriorly the basisphenoid rostrum bears a pair of facets projecting only slightly beyond its general surface, the so-called secondary basipterygoid processes, with which the anterior ends of the pterygoids articulate. Re-presented in Arctic snowstorms by D.s. spurissima (the so-called Po-matorhine Hoodwink), characterised by its more woolly appearance. D.s. sarah-janae (0. Hebrides), D.s. mrs-jonesae (Mull) and D.s. gretae-garbo (Clerkenwell) are doubtfully separable (This has not prevented the author of these names, in a laudable desire to immortalize various respectable females, from attempting to separate them until they have become extinct. This process has been termed "going into a cline"). Bones of a closely related genus, Palaeodissimulatrix, have been found in kitchen middens.

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M. F. M. Meiklejohn

Carstramon Wood, 2006: a nestbox diary

Left: *Carstramon Woods* *Brian Smith*

Brian Smith reports on a hectic spring schedule in Carstramon Wood, Galloway

28th March: The final round of nestboxes before spring. John, Mike and Brian tackle a separate part of the wood to save time. Territorial Nuthatches and tits calling in all parts, Woodcock put up by Brian who promptly fell over a fallen branch, hurting nothing but pride. Those boxes known to have held bats or shrews late in 2005 were cleaned out of old nest material.

15th April: Brian leading a walk in the wood for SWT, to celebrate Dumfries and Galloway Wildlife Festival. It was attended by 18 humans of all ages, but only one migrant was present. This was a Willow Warbler that had presumably won the race for the best site. Lesser Celandines, Wood Sorrel and Dogs Mercury in bloom while all deciduous trees were bare.

8th May: A beautiful spring morning. Again, the task force split to generate time to enjoy the day. Twenty-three definite Pied Flycatcher nests, four of which had eggs. An unusual find was a dead Pied Flycatcher male in a nestbox, which was our second such incident since 2002. One Redstart nest with an egg, a great number of tit nests, but unfortunately no sign of Nuthatch occupancy.

Nest and eggs of Pied Flycatcher *Brian Smith*

23rd May: A marathon trip round all 130 boxes as a team of three to allow the scribe (Brian) to concentrate on his allotted task. There were 12 Blue Tit, 13 Great Tit, one Redstart and 21 Pied Flycatcher females sitting. Mike gently lifted the Redstart and Pied Flycatchers for ringing. Many of the Pied Flycatchers were born in the wood in previous years, including one bird from 2003 which had made the hazardous trip to winter in West Africa three times. Even more surprising was that she was incubating 10 eggs. Two females lifted that day carried rings that did not belong to North Solway Ringing Group and we await the news of those rings with interest. It was a very happy group that returned to their homes, tired that night.

30th May: the team made a full round again. Numbers of Pied Flycatcher females were brooding young pulli (the term used to describe all young birds prior to fledging). Some females were lifted for ringing.

6th June: A major day for ringing pulli with a full team. John and Mike ringed 148 Pied Flycatcher and 12 Redstart pulli during the day. A magic moment occurred at one nestbox. As we approached, a Roe doe slipped away from the area and while we worked I heard a strange sound between a squeak and a call. On turning round I could see a Roe calf so young that it had not yet learnt to lie quietly while Mum was away. Once the ringers had seen the youngster and completed their task the team slipped away as quietly as the doe.

10th June: A day ringing with the 'mini-team' (no John or Brian). Pat accompanied Mike who ringed 59 Pied Flycatcher and 7

Pullus ringing *Brian Smith*

Pied Flycatcher young *Steven Blow*

Redstart pulli. This might seem an easy day to the reader who has not visited Carstramon Wood. The 72 hectares of mainly Pedunculate oak lie on a steep slope beside the Water of Fleet. Although SWT maintains paths in the wood our boxes are not on them. By mid June the bracken has replaced the bluebells and is chest high for most people!

20th June: This was a "meet the new Conservation Manager" day. Steven Blow, who was replacing Julian Warman, joined the team to cover part of the round of boxes. What a useful young man! Unlike the ringing team who usually forget a camera Steven had his digital poised at all times. When asked to photograph young pulli he duly obliged, When a newly emerged Golden-ringed Dragonfly was found beneath a bracken frond he obliged again. The images were in the writer's computer that night. More magic!

20th June: An easy team visit today. Only boxes G12 in the south, B3 at highest point to the east, M11 & 20 heading north,

Golden-ringed Dragonfly *Steven Blow*

plus five other boxes were visited. Pied Flycatcher pulli were ringed - some had flown, some were too young to ring and some were dead in B3. A three-way discussion concluded that the proximity of mature beech trees in area B created ideal conditions for a Sparrowhawk flightpath to catch female Pied Flycatchers regularly flying to and from the box to feed newly hatched pulli.

26th June: A day for John on his own to visit two boxes only. This proved to be the last visit until late August to clean out the boxes. Once again this was a split-team occasion, each member having 40 boxes to clean alone before meeting at Area B to remove the 10 boxes. They have still to be resited in an area with no beech trees and a full bracken groundcover.

Footnote:

21st October, SOC Conference: in a weak moment Brian agrees to supply Jimmy Maxwell with an illustrated article for SBN. He's looking forward to being back in Carstramon Wood in 2007!

Brian Smith

Female Pied Flycatcher *Rab Smith*

Maury in Norfolk with "the Boys of the South West"

I can't remember where I first met Maury. It was probably in the early 50s when watching Lesser Whitefronts with the Bean Geese at the Drum near Castle Douglas.

As with me, Norfolk was one of his favourite haunts - he said it was one of the coldest places in Britain when the winter wind was blowing from the east - and one of the few places where he had to wear two pairs of trousers!

Maury depended a lot on friends and public transport to get around and when he arrived by train at King's Lynn, he would set off on foot in the direction of Cley. If he did not get a lift, he would visit the roadside pubs en-route and partake of his simple diet - a pint of beer and a Mars Bar.

I had the good fortune to stay with my family in the George Hotel in Cley at the same time as Maury and it was there that I discovered how fond of children he was. It was usually at lunch-time when he would come across to our table and speak to the girls and exchange bird news. Sometimes he would be absent for the evening meal and would most likely be at the Bell Hotel in Wiverton playing the locals at cribbage - a card game that he loved.

Local knowledge is a great thing; furnished with that, he and I set off for Smokers' Hole to hunt for the elusive Stone Curlews. We raked the big field with our binoculars, but their camouflage was so good it was like looking for a black cat in a coal cellar! The light was just beginning to fade when suddenly a bird called. Neither of us had heard this call before, but we both knew what it was. It called again and this time we managed to latch on to it. The telescope was already set up in anticipation and eventually we both had very good views of it.

On another occasion - this time with "the Boys from the South West" (the Dumfries contingent) - we met up with Maury and Willie Austin at the George. The landlady and her daughter Fiona both had a tremendous sense of humour. We had a hilarious night full of fun and laughter, and no-one enjoyed it more than Maury. As the locals drifted away and closing time approached, the local policeman came in, hung his jacket in the cupboard and joined in. It was in the "wee sma hoors" when we headed back to our tent in a disused rubbish tip on Salthouse Heath.

At dawn the following morning, an unusual bird was spotted in the distance

The Norfolk hoodwink *Jim Young*

on the far side of Arnold's Marsh. Its description defied the imagination. At first it appeared to be asleep, having probably travelled a long distance. But the lack of movement began to raise our suspicions and as the light intensified, reality began to sink in - the Norfolk Hoodwink had fooled us all! The red phone in Nancy's tearoom across from the George was living up to its colour and had already relayed the "hot" news to all. Sadly, it was too late to stop those on their way there by bus, car and bikes (there being no pagers then). The East bank was not the happiest of places that day - disappointment, anger and frustration prevailed. R.A.Richardson was said to have "looped the loop" - while some of the other notable bird-watchers were not to be seen! Only one man was brave enough to photograph this local spoof and that was Jim Young (see photo).

So where was the author and inventor of the original Hoodwink? - probably between the Hielan' Man's Umbrella and the Hamilton Rubbish Tip (ie the Low Parks).

Bobby Smith

Maury with Mrs. Burnett behind and Fiona (with foot) - and from left to right; Peter Gordon, Bobby Smith, Willie Austin, Jimmy Maxwell, John Young and Derek Skilling.

The Lapwing run

It was five o'clock on a bright sunny morning in early June that we left Newburgh and started on a Lapwing run that would last all day. The plan was to ring as many Lapwing and other wader chicks as possible that we could spot from the road side. Generally these ringing trips are quick visits to local road-side marshes and wet fields in Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, but this run was to take us across Buchan, into Strathspey, then into Deeside via Tomintoul and ending up in Aberdeen; a round trip of 250 miles. Whenever we spotted Lapwings, Oystercatchers, Redshanks or Curlews (or other wader species if we were lucky) by the road side, a quick check was made to see if they had chicks. Alert behaviour and alarm calls were the give away signs. If chicks were spotted, one of us would energetically jump the fence - often barbed! - and be guided by the other to the now crouching chicks. By the end of the day we had ringed a total of 110 chicks, 88 of which were Lapwings (Table 1). This was in 1972.

Table 1. *Numbers of wader chicks ringed on the different Lapwing runs.*

	1972	1973	2006
Lapwing	88	67	31
Golden Plover	1		
Oystercatcher	10	5	6
Curlew	6	2	1
Redshank	5		
Total	110	74	38

The run was repeated in 1973, and again many wader chicks were ringed. The totals given in Table 1 are thought to be incomplete, through lost files. However, these minima are indicative.

Although we were aware that farmers were gradually draining wet fields and marshes and changing their farming methods, we naively assumed that across highland Scotland, there would always be wet pastures with their associated tumbling Lapwings, bleating Snipe and bubbling Curlews. Of course, farmers, driven by government subsidies, were continuing this process unabatedly. In order to quantify the losses, and as a means of alerting people to what was happening, a national survey was set up by a joint SOC/Wader Study Group in 1982 and 1983 to obtain baseline data. Galbraith, Furness & Fuller (1984, *Scottish Birds* 13, 98–107) estimated that there were 64,000 pairs of Lapwings, 23,000 Oystercatchers and 5,000 Redshanks on the machair and other Scottish farmland.

Since then, there have been repeated surveys of waders on farmland. Most recently, O'Brien & White (2003, *Scottish Birds* 24, 17–28) made total estimates for farmland and upland breeding waders in Scotland. These comprised 91,000 pairs of Lapwings, 94,000 Oystercatchers, 59,000 Curlews and 14,000 Redshanks. Note that these two surveys refer to different areas of Scotland, so are not comparable.

Although these figures are impressive, we feel that by time of the first survey, a lot of change had already occurred. Comparing the situation in the 1980s with the situation we knew in the 1970s, much had already been lost in that decade. It is possible too, that waders had been even more abundant prior to the 1970s. On speaking to Jim Dunbar (ex warden at Strathbeg), he commented that, "you should have seen it in the 1950s". I could concur with this because I remember breeding Redshanks within the city limits of Dundee in the 1950s.

So, is there any way of quantifying the situation prior to Galbraith *et al.* Perhaps the numbers of chicks we ringed in the early 1970s would give a measure. This led to us considering the repetition of the Lapwing run. In our discussion about repeating the run as closely as possible, we jokingly wondered about getting a beat up Mini. We also wondered if we could still jump barbed-wire fences and run down Lapwing chicks if they decided to leg it, and, most importantly, if today's traffic would allow us safely to stop our car on busy Grampian and Highland roads. In the end, our compromise was to use a Fiesta, and start at a different part of the circuit (Newtonmore instead of Newburgh).

When we headed out on the 9 June 2006, we were rather pessimistic about what we would find, but in the event, did hit hot spots. For example, at Tomintoul, in the same fields we had ringed in 1972, we still found breeding Lapwings, Oystercatchers and Redshanks. In Deeside though, we met more intensive agriculture, changed cropping regimes, neater fields and hardly any waders. We also found Oystercatchers still on eggs, suggesting the failure of the first clutch.

After negotiating Aberdeen, we headed up the coast to Newburgh and dropped in at our old watering hole - the Udny Arms Hotel. Apart from a few Lapwings on the immediate outskirts of Newburgh, there were few waders across Buchan and it was not until marshy fields among the hills around Dufftown that we again found any significant number of wader chicks. By this time we were convinced that not only were fences higher and had to be more carefully negotiated, but the volume of traffic had changed hugely since the 1970s and it was disconcerting to see whisky tankers thundering past when we were parked up and standing on roadside verges!

Figure 1. *The route of the Lapwing run in northeast Scotland. No searching was carried out between Aberdeen and Newburgh.*

By 8 pm, we completed the circuit. We had clocked up 38 wader chicks, 31 of which were Lapwings - less than half the number we had ringed in the 1970s. It is difficult to draw too much from this quick survey, but it is indicative of what may have been lost. We got the impression that, in specific areas of the uplands, there were still many breeding waders, but there was a dearth in the lowlands. We now intend a more detailed survey to better explore the changes (but using methods which can be implemented with decorum and safety by two wader enthusiasts who came of age several decades ago!)

Ron Summers and Nigel Buxton

Ringer Nigel in 1972 *Ron Summers*

Ringer Nigel in 2006 *Ron Summers*

NOTES & COMMENT

Sparrowhawk 1

It was very much a case of being in the right place at the right time! I was at the back of the house when I heard a terrible screeching sound coming from the front patio. The Sparrowhawk had just taken a Starling which had been visiting the bird-table regularly to feed on the peanut cake. I ran to get my camera and carefully drawing back the net curtains, managed to get several shots over the next few minutes. The Starling was still very much alive at this point, but by the time the Sparrowhawk became aware of my presence and flew off it had succumbed. Starlings are by no means common in this area and this is the second time I have witnessed such an incident, so they are even scarcer now! Once again, by providing food for the birds in our gardens, we are also doing the local predators a favour.

Gordon Jamieson

Male Sparrowhawk on prey *Gordon Jamieson*

Sparrowhawk 2

While preparing last nights meal, I happened to glance out the window, and there gazing back, only three yards in front of me, was a young female Sparrowhawk. She was perched on a branch close to the large bird feeder that is visited daily by a flock of House Sparrows. Fortunately, I keep my camera on the kitchen worktop and I was quite surprised at her relaxed manner as I photographed her. She seemed to be looking for something nearer the ground, and after a few minutes, swooped from her perch towards a small Blackcurrent bush where three of my chickens were sitting, causing one nervous individual to shoot almost vertically into the air. I know female Sparrowhawks are capable of killing birds as large as pheasants but I thought this was a bit ambitious for this youngster. However, without making contact, she eventually flew off. It was a full ten minutes later before I discovered what she was really after. As I watched the chickens settle down under the same small Blackcurrent bush, a solitary House Sparrow, realising that the coast was clear, shot out from his temporary refuge and joined the rest of the flock.

Frank Stark

Female Sparrowhawk *Frank Stark*

Why Herring Gull?

On the 6th July 06, my wife and I were on a North 58? Sea Adventure trip from Gardenstown around the RSPB reserve at Troup Head (NJ 825674). It was a glorious sunny day and as expected, there were large numbers of Kittiwakes, Herring Gulls, Gannets, Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins, etc. feeding out at sea. There must have been several shoals of fish present as there were birds feeding all around us, some in large groups. We were also very lucky to come across two adult Harbour Porpoises with a small calf, and later on at least two or three Minke Whales, also with a calf.

At one point we came across a large flock of Herring Gulls together with a few Kittiwakes and some auks feeding, when a Great Skua caused the birds to panic and scatter as it attacked an adult Herring Gull. After a long struggle lasting perhaps a few minutes, it finally killed or drowned the gull by pecking violently at its head and pushing it under the water. It then proceeded to pluck some of the feathers before beginning to eat the gull. It was joined by a second Great Skua which attempted to scavenge from the carcass. What was surprising was that other Herring Gulls flew away, but the auks surrounded this battle a few yards away and appeared to take a great interest in what was going on. One also wonders why the skua attacked such a large bird as a Herring Gull when there were so many auks and Kittiwakes in the area, many carrying food back to their young on the cliffs, which could easily have been pirated. There were also young Guillemots on the water just below the cliffs which would have been easy prey.

Richard and Margaret Cinderey

Inland Pomarine

Following the reported sightings of Pomarine Skuas in the June issue of SBN, *Doug Mainland from Achmelvich sends this interesting report.*

On the 31st May 2006, I was at a hill loch near Ledmore Junction, Sutherland, which has a nesting colony of Common Gulls. While observing them, the whole colony got up and proceeded to mob a medium-sized bird on the shore of the loch. The bird took to flight and landed on the loch where I was able to identify it as a Pomarine Skua. After a while it took off and landed on the island beside a gull's nest and proceeded to consume the three eggs in it. Replete with contents of the well-developed eggs, it settled down on the island in spite of the continual mobbing by the gulls.

The RAF eventually managed to do what the gulls could not. A very low-flying aircraft lifted everything including the skua which again landed on the water to digest its plunder. The loch is about 20 kilometres from the sea.

Doug Mainland

Fulmar *Frank Stark*

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the Fulmar picture (above) and have a chance of winning an SOC carved Shelduck. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 83. Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell @virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC - see Page 3)

The winning caption from *SBN* 81 (see Starling photo right) came from Lang Stewart - "You did what in the water?" Well done! Others - "VULGARIS, do try and behave yourself, do not live up to your name"- Michael Thomas. "Just listen! Watch my beak. I'll no' hae ye fleein' aboot wi' they mad flockin' freens o' yours." - Andy Neustein.

Starlings *Stewart Love*

Rose-coloured Spectacle

This young Rose-coloured Starling was a regular visitor to a local garden in Stornoway. It had an interesting behaviour - it was able to climb vertically down inside a peanut feeder, pick up a peanut and then somehow reverse back out. Blue Tits do this of course, but they are small enough to turn in the feeder and escape head-first.

The strange thing is, the bird seemed to have difficulty digesting its hard-earned meal, often regurgitating the peanut a few moments after swallowing it. I advised my friend to chop up the peanuts and put out some chopped fruit and stale cake crumbs. It was an aggressive individual as well, running along the ground from the shelter of a bush or shrub to chase birds as big as Collared Doves. Its visit to Stornoway however was nearly ended when a female Sparrowhawk made an unsuccessful swooping attack on it.

Frank Stark

Golden Eagle Interaction

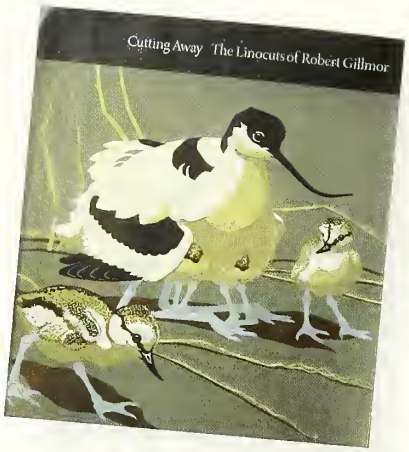
On 11 February 2004, just south of Bhran Cottage, in Glen Tromie, Badenoch, Highland Region, at circa 1700 hrs, I was alerted by what sounded like distress calls, from across the river. Glancing in that direction I immediately saw a Golden Eagle pinning down another Golden Eagle on the ground, amongst heather, approximately 100 metres away. After some early movements from the birds, activity ceased and I lost the lower eagle from view due to the vegetation. I continued to observe the incident until c1715, when dusk was approaching, so I decided to investigate more closely, in case by chance the birds were entangled in something. I waded the river and walked towards them. On covering half the distance the top eagle flew off low and was soon out of sight. The other eagle stood up, walked stiffly a few paces and then took off, flying unsteadily, before it too disappeared from view.

Dave Pierce
David.pierce@tesco.net

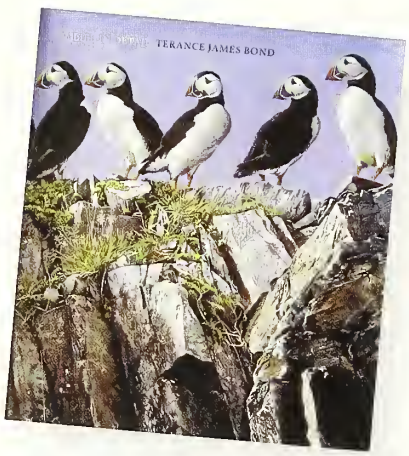
Juv. Rose-coloured Starling *Frank Stark*

One way to get nuts *Frank Stark*

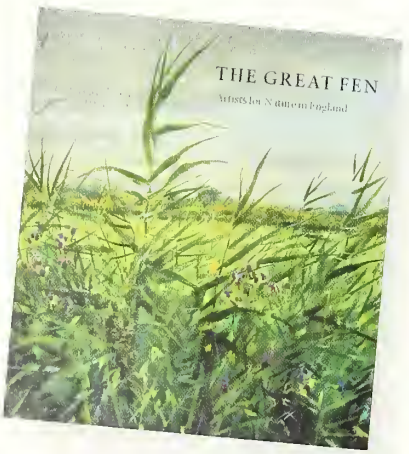
BOOK REVIEWS



Cutting Away - The Linocuts of Robert Gillmor, published 2006 by Langford Press, Peterborough. 180 pp, foreword by Nicholas Hammond, 170 illustrations, ISBN 1-904078-14-1, £35.



A Life in Detail by Terance James Bond, published 2006 by Langford Press, Peterborough. 180 pp, foreword by Rob Hume, 127 illustrations, ISBN 1-904078-17-6, £35.



The Great Fen - Artists for Nature in England, published 2006 by Langford Press, Peterborough. 167 pp, foreword by Baroness Young of Old Scone, text by Chris Gerrard, 200 illustrations, ISBN 1-904078-13-3, £35.

The stated aim of the Langford Press Wildlife Art Series of richly illustrated, large format (27cm x 30cm) books is to "excite and inspire readers with the best in contemporary wildlife art". Among these three new additions to the series, there will surely be something to appeal to all artistic tastes. The work displayed in them ranges from the hyper-realism in Terance James Bond's bird paintings to the much simpler linocut prints of Robert Gillmor, and the varied, imaginative and often impressionistic, art of the Artists for Nature Foundation. And it is because wildlife art fans' tastes are so varied that all three of these attractive books should do well. The quality of art reproduction in them is superb.

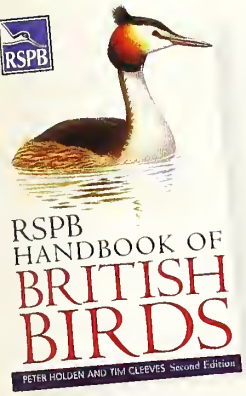
My personal favourite is "Cutting Away", because I have long admired Robert Gillmor's elegant art work, and particularly his linocuts. In his foreword to the book, Nicholas Hammond says that, as an artist, Gillmor is a master of the essentials - drawing, colour and composition. To me it is the simplicity of his designs, done with just a few colours, and his ability to capture the character of his (mostly bird) subjects, that make his prints so successful. Gillmor's accompanying text provides an introduction in which he describes how he started lino-cutting at school, the acquisition of his Albion press in the mid 1960s, how his printmaking ceased in 1971 because of pressure of other commercial work, and how it recommenced in 1998 when he and his wife moved from Reading to Norfolk. There is also an informative section on his working methods. The prints themselves are grouped in four sections - Early Days, Hares, Norfolk, and Graphic Works (for posters and New Naturalist book covers). Every print has a caption showing its size and how many blocks were used, as well as useful text putting it in context, and sometimes an accompanying sketch showing how it was composed. Gillmor's long and distinguished career commenced in the 1950s and he provides some most interesting historical anecdotes. Unlike the other two books, this one has a helpful index of print titles.

Like Robert Gillmor's, Terance James Bond's work has featured regularly in greeting cards and calendars for many years and is clearly very popular. Indeed the obvious commercial success of his art is confirmed in Rob Hume's foreword to "A Life in Detail", which says that more than 20 one-man exhibitions of his paintings all sold out. The publication of this book coincides with another major Bond exhibition and also celebrates his 60th birthday. After the book's introduction, in which Bond talks about his passion for detail and his obsession with trees, his paintings are presented in eight sections - Gardens, Buildings, Water, Mountain and Moorland, Farmland and Hedgerow, Painting by Numbers, Coast, and Woodland. Each section and each image has an introductory text, but dimensions of paintings are not provided. While his technical virtuosity is not in doubt, and his birds and their surroundings are convincing, I have often wondered why such detailed paintings that look like photographs are in such demand. In his introduction he admits to using photographs, but says he composes his pictures to achieve a harmonious balance. Fair enough, but the end results still look like photographs. Also, hyper-realistic artists like Bond usually paint with fast-drying acrylics, a medium that can easily result in images that appear harsh and lacking in subtlety. I cannot help feeling that Bond's paintings suffer in this way, in having simply too much contrast.

Founded in 1990, the Artists for Nature Foundation (ANF) uses art created by artists from all over the world as a way of drawing attention to the need for nature conservation in endangered environments. Over the years ANF has organised 11 projects in different countries, numerous exhibitions, and published ten books. During 2004 and 2005, the Great Fen Project in Cambridgeshire was the first UK conservation project to be visited by ANF, when 30 artists from as far away as Russia and the United States created an abundance of inspiring artwork, much of which is reproduced in "The Great Fen". This is England's most ambitious habitat restoration project to date, aimed at linking Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen National Nature Reserves by the gradual acquisition of adjoining land, and controlling water levels in the surrounding area. After a foreword by Baroness Young, and an introduction, this book's well-researched text by Chris Gerrard and its artistic content are divided into seven sections - Project Background, Fenland People, The Rothschild Effect, Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve, Holme Fen National Nature Reserve, Wildlife of the Ditches, and The New Land and the Future. It ends with short biographies of the artists and a bibliography. The artists' work shows a wide variety of styles and topics, ranging across field sketches of birds and other animals, detailed botanical and entomological studies, landscapes that are instantly

recognisable and landscapes that are almost abstract, sculptures using scrap metal found in the area, and transient paintings of dragonflies on bog oaks dug from the peat. Every illustration has a caption showing its artist, title, size and medium used. My enjoyment of past ANF books has been much enhanced by my discovery of new artists and new styles that I like, and "The Great Fen" does not disappoint me in this respect (I think Harriet Mead's sculpture "Bittern II" is outstanding). My only complaint is that the map of the project area shown on page 9 is too small for my eyesight!

John Savory



RSPB Handbook of British Birds. Holden, P. and Cleeves, T. 2006. Helm. ISBN 0-7136-7560-8. £9.99 Second edition; (the first was reviewed in SBN 65).

Although described as "the ideal reference for birdwatchers of all levels of interest and experience", it is rather limited in scope as it only covers the "282 commonest birds in Britain and Ireland". Since the first edition, the order of species has changed to reflect recent taxonomic changes, so that the book now starts with swans, geese and ducks rather than divers and grebes. Two new species have been added; Hooded Crow and Parrot Crossbill. One or two other minor taxonomic revisions are also included.

An excellent, up-to-date guide for beginners and the less experienced birdwatcher.

Paul Speak

The Secret Lives of British Birds
Dominic Cousins. Illustrations by Peter Partington
RSPB £14.99

This is the second in a series on the Secret Lives of Birds which explores how birds fit into their chosen habitat and then looks at the lesser known aspects of their lives. There are chapters covering 12 different habitats* in uplands, lowlands, wetlands, rivers, coast and open sea; each chapter gives a general overview of that landscape and then describes a few of the bird species found there.

It is lavishly illustrated with both photographs and water colours, 114 of the 190 species mentioned are illustrated. The text is imaginative and humorous. The description of how the Capercaillie lives through the winter in the treetops away from predators, existing on pine needles alone, made me smile. This description also highlights inconsistencies in coverage; though degradation of habitats and the effect on birds is mentioned in the section on Heaths and Moors, there is no mention in the Evergreen Forests section of how close the Capercaillie has come to extinction or of recent efforts to halt the decline in numbers.

This book is aimed at the interested layman, scientific facts are presented simply and the English(not latin) names for birds are used throughout. The index contains bird names only, but this is less of a problem as the section headings* are given on each page.

One problem is the cover; the glossy light weight card is already dog-eared after only two days of use - I'm not sure how well it will stand up to frequent use. The author wanted to celebrate birds and their habitats, and for me he has succeeded. There is no attempt to be comprehensive, the Red Kite although resident in Wales and re-introduced in Scotland and England is not mentioned. This is a good winter read.

*Heath and Moors, Farmland, Hills and Mountains, Still Water, Marshland ,Running Water, Scrub, Broad-leaved Woodland, Evergreen Forests, Estuaries, Sea Cliffs, Open sea.

Harriet Trevelyan

Changes to Scotland's Birdlife

Autumn 2007 will see the publication by SOC of the new long-awaited *Birds of Scotland*. Some five years in preparation, written by over 150 acknowledged experts and edited by a team of nine led by Ron Forrester and Ian Andrews, the book will bring forward work done in the 1950s by Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul, and by Valerie Thom in the 1980s, thus getting its working title of *BS3*. All 508 species ever recorded in Scotland will be included, from the one-off vagrants to the regular migrants, the all-important winter visitors and the breeding species that all combine to make the Scottish avifauna so fascinating. Extinctions, colonisations and the ups and downs of many species will illustrate the ever-changing nature of our avifauna dating back to the earliest records. The importance of Scottish populations will be placed in context, and threats and gaps in our knowledge highlighted.

This landmark publication will be in full colour, illustrated with 600 of the best photographs taken in Scotland and by 1,500 maps and charts. It will be some 1500 pages long, supplied in a boxed set of two volumes, and will be a must for everyone with an interest in Scottish birds, from the casual birdwatcher to the professional ornithologist and conservationist, and for visitor and resident alike.

Thanks to generous sponsorship, the RRP of the book will be only £75, with a pre-publication price of £60. Paid-up SOC members will be able to purchase a copy for £45. Members of the *BS3* team will be talking about the book, and some of the many developments that have been uncovered during its preparation, at a series of over 35 talks to Branches, Clubs and other interested groups during the spring of 2007, when the pre-publication offers will be available. Do take a note of when they will be speaking at your Branch, and make sure that this book is firmly at the top of your Christmas present list in 2007.

Well - bigger's no' always better!

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RECENT REPORTS

A review of autumn 2006

The bird of the autumn was undoubtedly the **Olive-tree Warbler** at Boddam (Shetland) on 16th Aug - a new British bird and indeed the first record for Western Europe. Remarkably the same garden that the bird frequented also played host to Britain's first **Ruppell's Warbler** in 1977. Identified on the day as an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, the true identity of the Olive-tree Warbler was finally established from photographs several weeks after it had gone. August generally was very good for rare and scarce migrants which centred around two falls in the 18th–25th period. Seven **Greenish Warblers** were seen between the 18th Aug –17th Sept with three in Aberdeenshire, two on Shetland and two on Fair Isle, with also on Fair Isle in Aug a juv. **Woodchat Shrike** probably of the eastern form *niloticus* on 18th–20th and a **Melodious Warbler**, present on 27th Aug–2nd Sept (the only one of the autumn). A second juv. Woodchat Shrike was seen there in Sept, on 2nd–13th with a female on Unst in Sept on 23rd–26th.

Greenish Warbler, Fair Isle *(Paul Baxter)*

The first **Barred Warbler** of the autumn was on the 11th Aug on Fair Isle with then 43 seen throughout Scotland by the end of the month, at least 16 of which were on Fair Isle - at least 65 Barred Warblers were then reported in Scotland in Sept. with 19 in Oct. Other scarcity totals for the whole period included 29 **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, 75 **Common Rosefinches**, 20 **Icterine Warblers**, 39 **Wrynecks** (mostly in Aug), 34 **Red-backed Shrikes**, 19 **Marsh Warblers** (a good showing, with all on the Northern Isles), at least nine **Ortolan Buntings** between 7th Sept–18th Oct all on Shetland and only 14 **Bluethroats** logged in a poor showing. An **Arctic Warbler** on Fetlar (Shetland) on 31st Aug was then followed by three others on Shetland in Sept and Oct and one was reported on Coll on 26th Sept - first record for Argyll if accepted. A **Red-rumped Swallow** found at Hoswick (Shetland) on 28th Aug remained until 18th Oct whilst an ad. **Rose-coloured Starling** was on Unst on 6th–16th Aug, with then five juveniles seen in Sept and Oct on Orkney, Outer Hebrides and Shetland (3).

Red-backed Shrike, North-East Scotland *(Harry Scott)*

Tiree (Argyll) had a fantastic autumn with a **Booted Warbler** at Balephetrish on 31st Aug–2nd Sept (the 2nd record for Argyll and Tiree) and a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** at Carnan Mor on 8th (first record for Argyll). Another Booted Warbler was on Fetlar (Shetland) on 18th–22nd whilst an elusive Western Bonelli's Warbler at St. Abbs Head on the 24th–26th Sept is the 1st record for Borders and a Bonelli's Warbler sp. (considered most likely to be a Western) was at Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) on 13th–18th Oct. Sept and Oct saw all the now expected Shetland and Fair Isle specialities turn up. A **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** was at Skaw, Whalsay on 2nd Oct with a River Warbler on Foula on 3rd–4th Oct. Three **Lanceolated Warblers** were seen: two different on Fair Isle on 15th Sept and one on Foula on 5th–9th Oct. Single **Yellow-breasted Buntings** were on Whalsay on 11th Sept and Fair Isle on 15th–16th Sept, two imm **Black-headed Buntings** were on Shetland in Sept, a Great Snipe was at Baltasound, Unst on 11th–12th Sept., and there was a **Black-throated Thrush** on Foula on 7th–9th Oct. Three Arctic Redpolls in Oct were on Foula and Fair Isle (2), an **Aquatic Warbler** was on Fair Isle on 16th–21st Sept and single **Red-throated Pipits** were there on 18th Sept and 12th–15th Oct. Six **Short-toed Larks** were on Shetland from 23rd Sept, four **Citrine Wagtails** were reported from the 3rd Sept and three **Siberian Stonechats** from the 18th Sept (two on Whalsay and one on the Out Skerries). Four **Rustic Buntings** from the 27th Sept were on Foula (2), Fair Isle and Unst and four **Pechora Pipits** were seen from the 15th Sept: on Fair Isle, Fetlar, Foula and at Sumburgh.

The rarest migrants on Shetland though came in Oct when no fewer than three different **Red-flanked Bluetails** were seen: at Westing, Unst on 13th–16th, Skaw, Whalsay on 21st–24th and Brae on 23rd. (Three of the species were also seen in the autumn of 2003 in Scotland.) Two **Blyth's Pipits** in Oct were at Sumburgh on 12th and Fair Isle on 21st–24th (third–fourth Scottish records, the previous two having been on Fair Isle in 1988 and 1993)

whilst only six **Richard's Pipits**, all on Orkney and Shetland, were seen from the 24th Sept and around 14 **Little Buntings** from the 18th Sept were all on the Northern Isles. Three **Thrush Nightingales** were on Shetland, Orkney and a very late bird on Fair Isle on 25th–28th Oct. Three **Olive-backed Pipits** in Sept, all on Shetland, were then followed by an impressive 12 in Oct including two different on North Ronaldsay, one on South Uist and one trapped at Blackdog (Aberdeenshire) on the 21st (only the 7th record for Mainland Scotland).

If it seemed that most of the rares and scarcities were on Shetland, well of course as usual they largely were, but there were two **Blyth's Reed Warblers** identified in the field on mainland Scotland in Sept - at Auchmithie (Angus) on 16th–18th and Skateraw (Lothian) on 17th with another in Sept on North Ronaldsay on 23rd–30th. A 1st-winter **Isabelline Shrike** was at Brue, Lewis on 22nd–29th Sept and then Barra on 30th Sept–1st Oct - (the 1st record for the Outer Hebrides) with another 1st-winter bird on Eday (Orkney) in the last week of Sept–3rd Oct at least. A female **Desert Wheatear** was near Meikle Loch on 21st Oct (third record for Aberdeenshire) whilst a **Radde's Warbler** showed well near Castlesea Bay (Angus) on 15th Oct with another the same day near Spiggie (Shetland).

Also in Oct., an elusive **Hoopoe** was in the Longside/Fetterangus/New Deer area (Aberdeenshire) from the 12th (still present on 7th Nov at least) with another on Yell (Shetland) on 14th Oct. Eight **Great Grey Shrikes** were reported from the 11th Oct and three **Shore Larks** from the 20th Oct - all were in Lothian. 120 **Yellow-browed Warblers** were seen in Sept following on from the first one on Foula on the 10th. Most were on Shetland, including 45 scattered throughout the islands on the 30th alone. An amazing 190+ were reported in Oct., again mainly on the Northern Isles, though record numbers were on the Outer Hebrides with c.30 logged there. With this influx, surprisingly only two **Firecrests** were seen in Oct., both on Shetland and only four **Pallas's Warblers** were found between 11th–20th Oct: three of them on Shetland and one at Skirza (Caithness) on 13th–14th.

Nine migrant **Honey Buzzards** in Sept represents the best showing since 2000, whilst up to two **Snowy Owls** were on the Outer Hebrides, one on North Uist throughout and one on western Lewis on 9th Sept. It was a generally disappointing period for sea-watching although in Aug and Sept, like last year, good numbers of **Great Shearwaters** were again noted including a record land-based Scottish count of 190 birds past the Butt of Lewis on 29th Aug. **Balearic Shearwater**, in terms of numbers, is going in the reverse direction in Scotland, with this and last year being the worst two autumns for several years, though amongst the 10 birds reported in Sept were included 8th and 9th records for Angus, off Fishtown of Usan on the 7th and 21st.

Snowy Owl, Outer Hebrides *(Martin Scott)*

Lesser Yellowlegs, North-East Scotland *(John Anderson)*

In stark contrast to last autumn's record showing, there were no American passerines seen at all in Scotland this autumn, though North American waders were again noted in good numbers and variety. An early juv. **Baird's Sandpiper** at Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) on 17th Aug proved to be the only one of the autumn, with then in Oct, Unst playing host to a **Upland Sandpiper** at Norwick then Baltasound on 6th–7th. Also in Oct a **Killdeer** was at Clachan Sands, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) around the 19th with then presumably the same bird on Oronsay (Argyll) on the 21st. At least 26 **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were seen from the 17th Aug including 16+ on the Outer Hebrides alone including counts of five on South Uist, three on Baleshare and three on St. Kilda during Sept. From the 31st Aug, at least 26 **Pectoral Sandpipers** were reported including up to five on the Outer Hebrides during Sept and three together at Mill Dam of Rango (Orkney) on 16th Sept. On the 29th Aug both a **Pacific Golden Plover** and an ad. **American Golden Plover** were found on Tiree (Argyll) - they both remained into Sept, the Pacific being the 2nd record for Argyll, the previous one having also been on Tiree. A further seven American Golden Plovers were seen in Sept and Oct including a juv at Loch Ryan on 16th–29th Oct - the first record for Dumfries & Galloway. A juv **Lesser Yellowlegs** was found at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (Aberdeenshire) on 15th Sept, it was still there the next day before

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White-rumped Sandpiper (right) with Dunlin, Fair Isle *(Linda Baillie)*

relocating to Meikle Loch on the 17th where it remained showing well until the 3rd Oct. In Oct, five **White-rumped Sandpipers** were seen between the 7th–25th on Islay (2), Fair Isle, North Ronaldsay and Tyninghame (Lothian) on 8th–9th. Amongst rare waders, a juv. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** was at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 18th–20th Aug.

Franklin's Gull, N-E Scotland *(Hugh Addlesee)*

An ad. **Franklin's Gull** was on the Ythan Estuary (Aberdeenshire) on 21st–26th Aug - only the third record for mainland Scotland after singles in Ayrshire in 1980 and Lothian in 1992. An ad. **Laughing Gull** was at Brora (Highland) on and off between 13th Aug–9th Oct at least, a **Bonaparte's Gull** was reported at Dalgety Bay on 17th Oct (third record for Fife if accepted) whilst two ad. **Ross's Gulls** were reported in Argyll: off Aird, Tiree on 9th Aug and Loch Gruinart, Islay on 3rd Oct (2nd and 3rd county records if accepted). The only **Yellow-legged Gull** was a near adult bird in the Peterhead/Fraserburgh area (Aberdeenshire) whilst it was a very good autumn for **Mediterranean Gull** with 70+ reported in Sept and Oct. Five **Ring-billed Gulls** were reported - on the Outer Hebrides, Dunbartonshire, Upper Forth, Highland and Angus. A little excitement was generated in mid-Sept by a **White Pelican** at Broughty Ferry (Angus) from 10th till the morning of the 15th , then also on the 15th it was seen in flight near Alyth (Perth & Kinross), then at Loch Insh (Highland) before settling at Findhorn Bay (Moray & Nairn) on 17th–19th. Unfortunately its wings showed signs of having been clipped and it is thought to be an escape from a continental zoo, having been seen in Germany, Netherlands and Kent earlier in the summer. A juv. **Common Crane** was in Caithness in Oct whilst an imm **Spoonbill** was at Torry Bay (Fife) on 15th Oct, at Kinneil (Upper Forth) on 17th Oct–4th Nov and then nearby at Skinflats from the 5th. Another imm. bird was at Lochlea (Ayrshire) on 1st Nov.

Autumn seemed to end abruptly during the last week of Oct and into Nov. In the first week of Nov., northerly winds resulted in very large numbers of **Little Auks** in the North Sea with counts of 2,450 in just two hours past Kinghorn Harbour (Fife) on the 5th, 1,637 in four hours past Fishtown of Usan on 2nd (an Angus record count), 672 past Dunbar (Lothian) on the 4th and 329 past Girdle Ness, Aberdeen on the 2nd. In late Oct., 10 **Waxwings** were reported from the 19th with small numbers seen into Nov, though a flock of 42 birds near Brora (Highland) on 4th may be an indicator that there is going to be yet another good winter for the species. A **Black Duck** on Fair Isle from 1st–5th Nov at least was the 1st record for the island and was part of a mini influx of North American wildfowl in the first week of Nov that also included single **Ring-necked Ducks** on Shetland and the Outer Hebrides and drake **American Wigeons** on South Uist, back again at Wick (Caithness) and in Ayrshire.

Angus Murray

The above is mainly based on records reported to Birdline Scotland, though special thanks for additional summaries to Deryk Shaw (Fair Isle), Eric Meek (Orkney) and John Bowler (Tiree).

This is the last sightings report from Angus Murray - for 16 years we have enjoyed the fruits of his efforts, keeping us up to date with all the current bird appearances in Scotland. The SOC is very grateful for this voluntary service and wishes him well in all the other work which makes demands on his time. We will be looking for a suitable replacement before the next edition - someone obviously interested in significant Scottish bird records including rarities and the kind of commitment that Angus has shown to get it into print on time for each issue. (Ed.)

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the *Scottish Birds* Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SCO 009859).

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